

A HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

by the Rev. Sohn Byoung-Ho

With this book on A History of the Presbyterian Church, published in 418 pages by the Department of Education of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Author, the Rev. Sohn Byoung-Ho, puts us all in his debt with a most timely and greatly needed volume.

It is surprising that this should be the first major work on this subject in Korean. Presbyterians have always been the largest Protestant denomination in Korea, and in fact, they represent more than half of all the Christians in Korea, both Protestant and Catholic. Korea has more than twice as many Presbyterians as Catholics.

Yet after almost one hundred years of Presbyterian history in Korea, only now has a Korean scholar produced a general church history of this important branch of the Protestant Reformation. It will be a great contribution not only to Presbyterians but to all Christians in this country.

Mr. Sohn is well qualified to write such a book. He is head of the Department for Planning, and Secretary of the Institute of Missions at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Korea, which is now probably the largest Presbyterian seminary in the world. He is a graduate of Soongsil College (now Soongjun University) and of the seminary. He has studied in both Europe and America, at the Presbyterian Theological College in Belfast, Ireland, at Fuller Theological Seminary, and at San Francisco Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) where he is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

The book is more than a historical survey. Mr. Sohn's opening chapters on the Biblical precedents of Presbyterianism, its meaning and essential characteristics, and its organizational forms and creedal bases, lay a solid philosophical and theological foundation for his study of Presbyterian history.

The historical survey he gives is deep and broad and is a significant collection into one convenient volume of the whole sweep of the rise and growth of the Presbyterian churches.

The early Reformation period covers the break with Rome and the life and work of John Calvin. It continues with the spread of the Presbyterians through Switzerland and France to the Netherlands, Scotland, England and Ireland, with brief summaries of more recent developments, concluding with an important section which analyzes the theology of the Presbyterians.

There follows a valuable and extensive treatment of the history of Presbyterianism in the United States of America. But one of the pleasing assets of the book is that it is written in Asia by an Asian, and is not limited in its vision by a Western viewpoint. It includes, therefore, not only sections on Canada, Australia and New Zealand, but also the history of Presbyterians in Mexico, Brazil, Japan and China. And of course, Korea!

No history of Presbyterianism can leave out the amazing vitality and growth and missionary zeal of the Korean Presbyterian churches, and the author is rightly proud of his own heritage. But he also honestly acknowledges and records the tragic divisions and ~~xxkix~~ serious problems facing the church in Korea.

No Presbyterian church library should be without this important volume, and Christians of all denominational persuasions will greatly benefit from reading and studying the history of a church that more than any other has contributed to the history of Christianity in Korea.

-- Samuel Hugh Moffett
Seoul
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